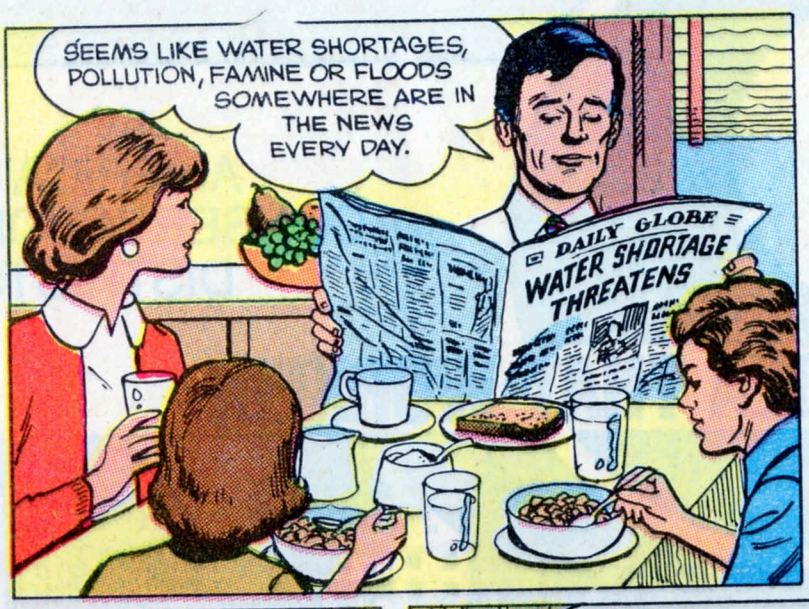
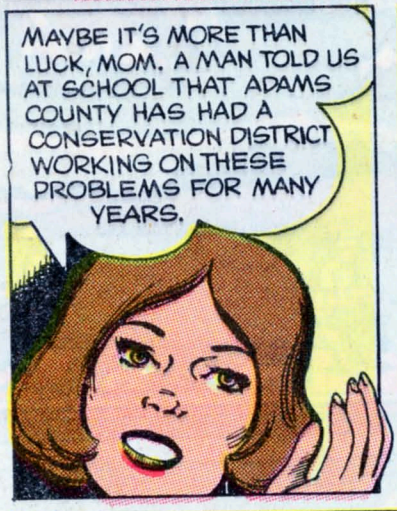
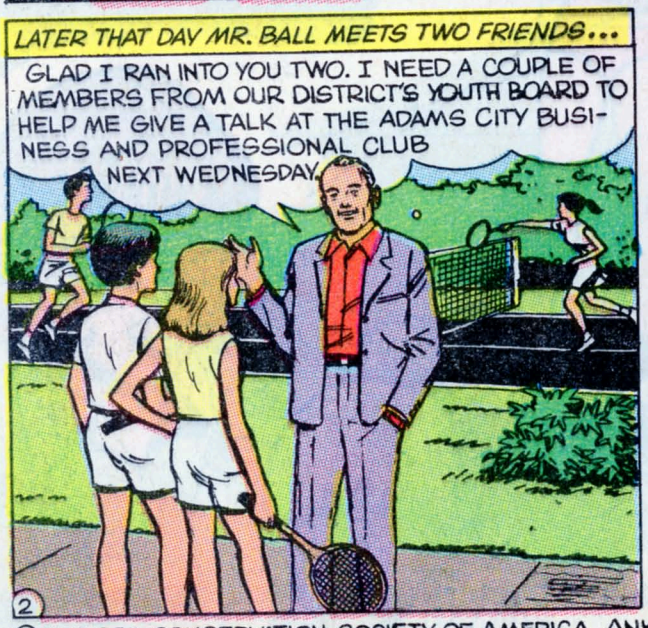
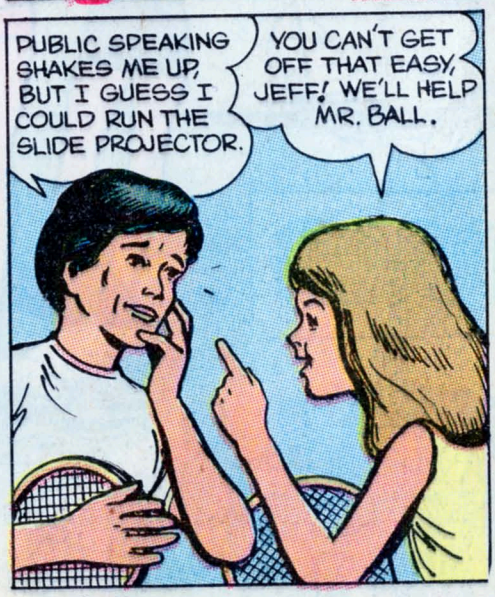
THE IDEA THAT WORKED!

AMERICA'S CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

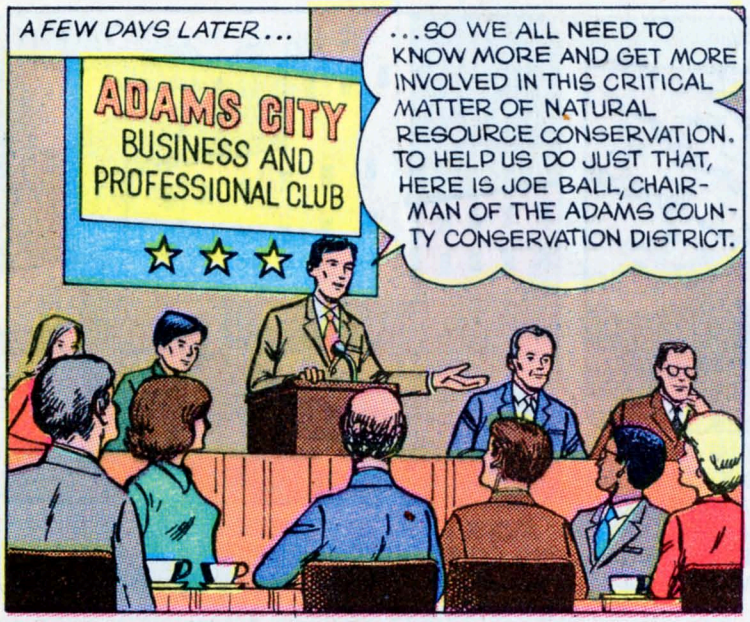




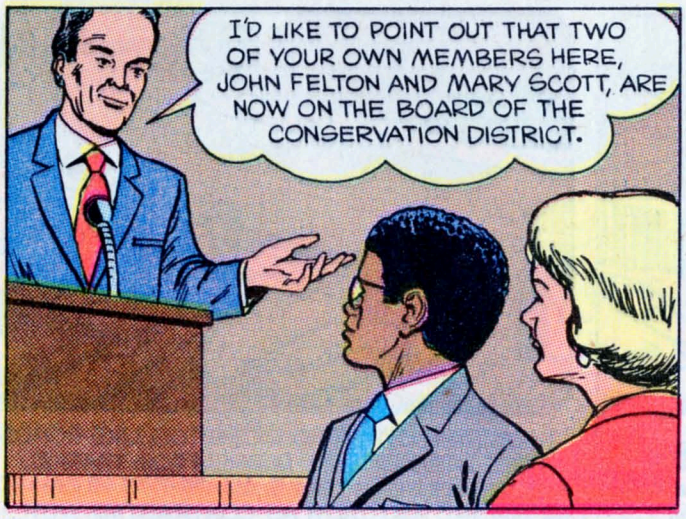




©1977 SOIL CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA, ANKENY, IOWA.

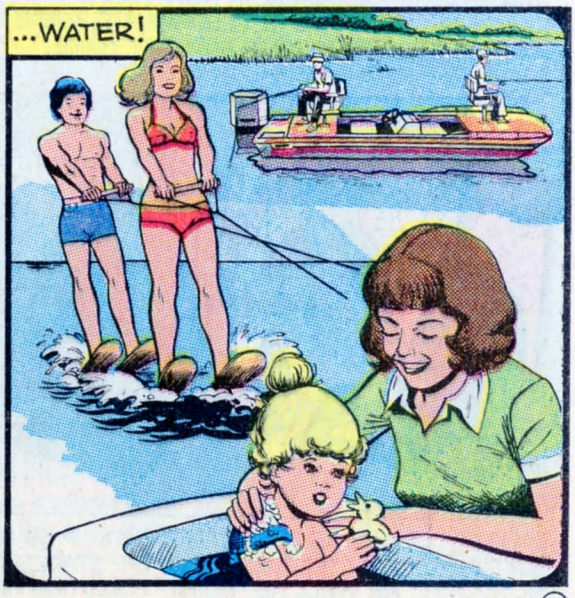

A FEW DAYS LATER...
ADAMS CITY BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL CLUB
...SO WE ALL NEED TO KNOW MORE AND GET MORE INVOLVED IN THIS CRITICAL MATTER OF NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION. TO HELP US DO JUST THAT, HERE IS JOE BALL, CHAIRMAN OF THE ADAMS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT.

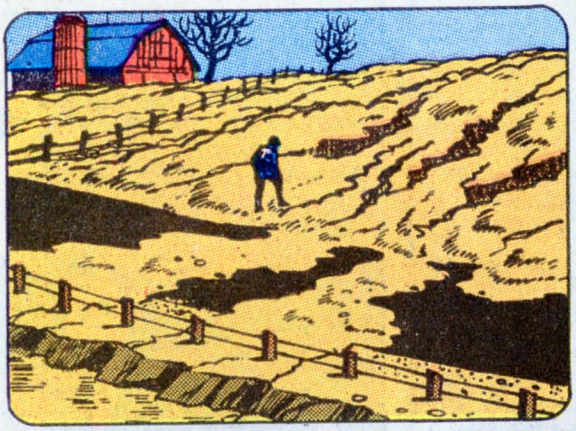
THANKS, BOB. THESE YOUNG PEOPLE HERE ARE ANN JENKINS AND JEFF MEYERS, YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS FROM OUR... YOUR... CONSERVATION DISTRICT. THEY ARE GOING TO HELP ME TELL ABOUT SOME INTERESTING DEVELOPMENTS.


I'D LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT TWO OF YOUR OWN MEMBERS HERE, JOHN FELTON AND MARY SCOTT, ARE NOW ON THE BOARD OF THE CONSERVATION DISTRICT.

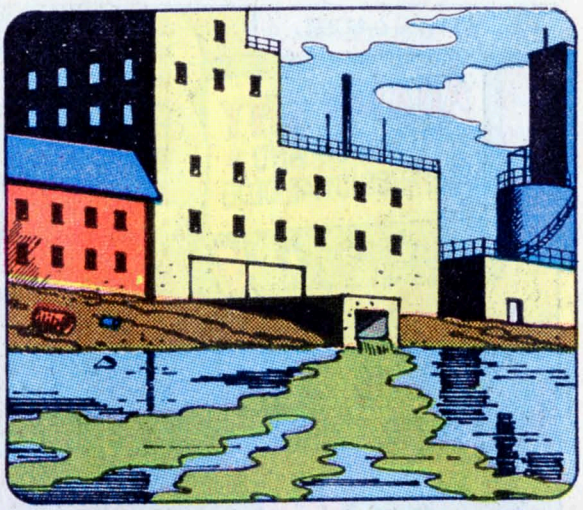
THAT, IN ITSELF, IS ONE OF THE IMPORTANT NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN CONSERVATION -- IT'S NOT JUST A RURAL PROBLEM OR JUST A JOB FOR US FARMERS ANY MORE.

ONE CONCERN OF RESOURCE CONSERVATION, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THIS WIDER INTEREST...

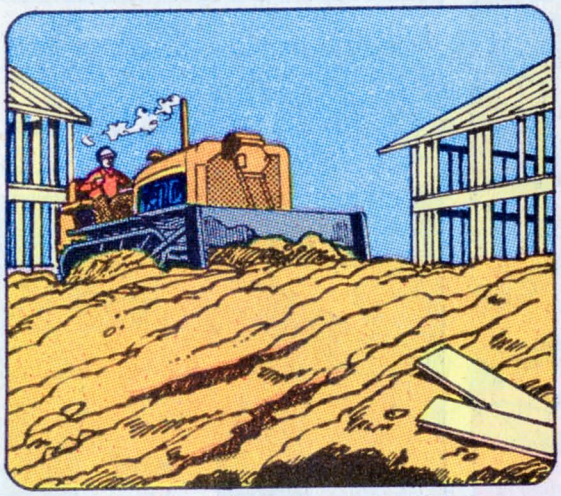

...WATER!



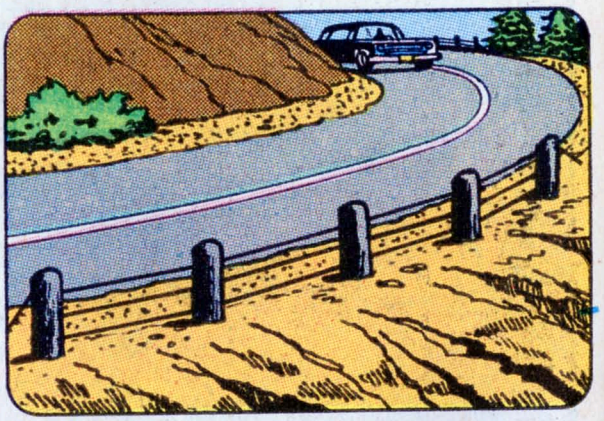
CONSERVATIONISTS REALIZED THAT SEDIMENT (SOIL WASHED OFF LAND WHEN EROSION TAKES PLACE) IS THE GREATEST WATER POLLUTANT, BY VOLUME, THAT WE HAVE. MUCH OF IT COMES FROM FARMS WITHOUT ADEQUATE EROSION CONTROL AND MAY CONTAIN CHEMICALS AND CONTAMINATING DEBRIS.



MORE RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN GROWING CONCERN ABOUT WATER POLLUTION FROM INDUSTRIAL WASTES AND INADEQUATE SEWAGE DISPOSAL.

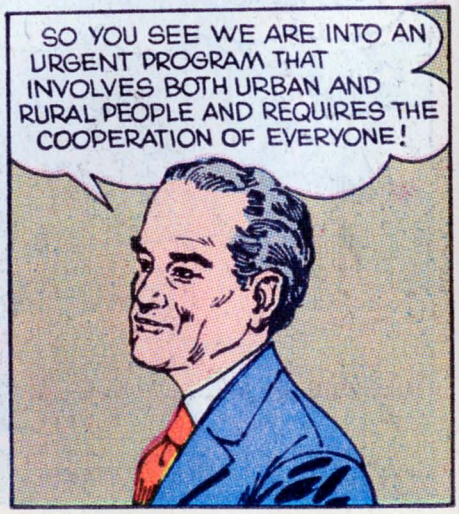


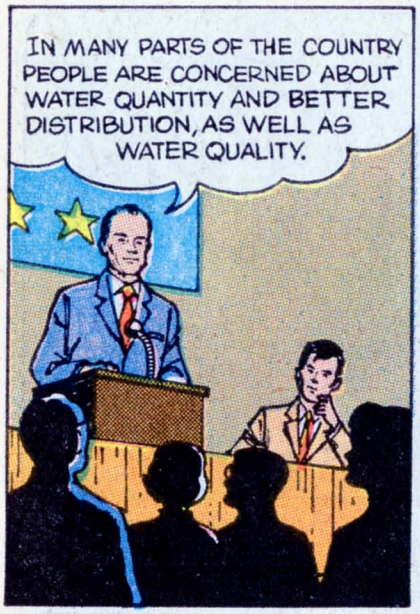
MUCH COMES ALSO FROM NON-FARM SOURCES, LIKE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS, WHERE SOIL HAS BEEN DISTURBED AND LEFT BARE.

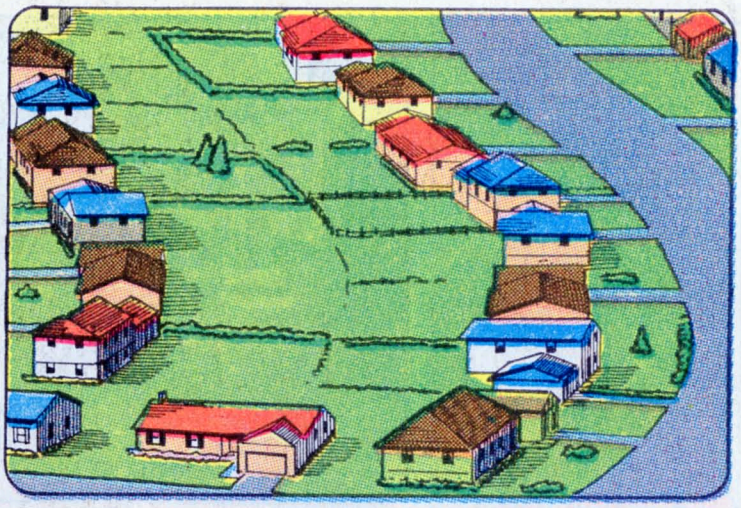


THERE ARE OTHER SOURCES, TOO, LIKE ROADS, WHERE BOTH SOIL AND DEBRIS FROM TRAFFIC MAY WASH INTO STREAMS. ALL OF THIS IS CALLED "NONPOINT" POLLUTION AS CONTRASTED WITH "POINT" POLLUTION, WHICH COMES FROM ONE SPECIFIC OUTLET, LIKE A SEWER.

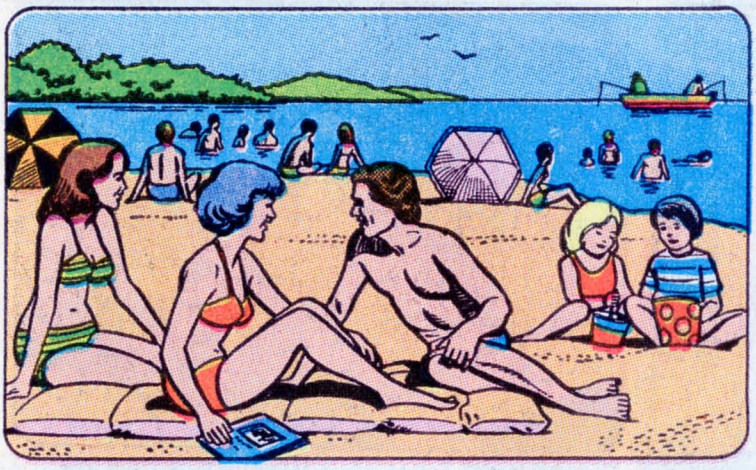
IN 1972 CONGRESS SAID WATER SHOULD BE SWIMMABLE AND FISHABLE BY 1983 AND TOLD THE STATES TO CONTROL "NONPOINT" AS WELL AS "POINT" POLLUTION SOURCES.



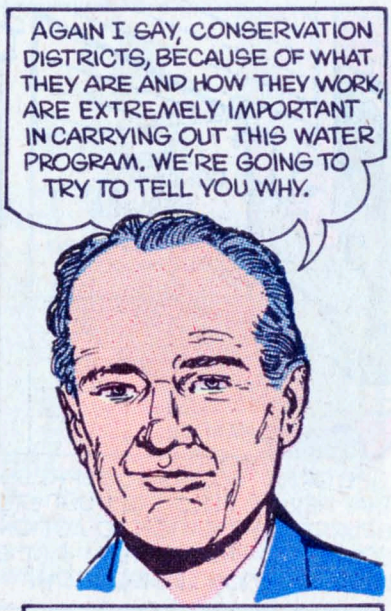




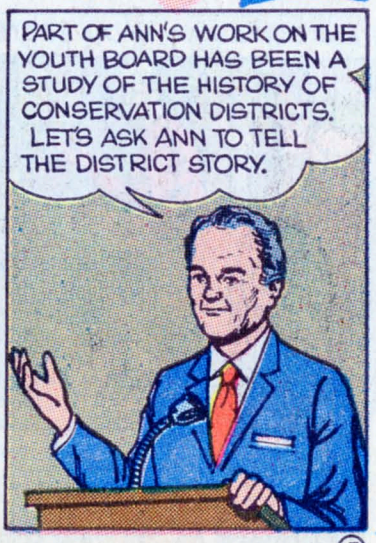
THAT'S BECAUSE OF GROWING POPULATION, LARGELY. IN 25 YEARS WE'LL HAVE PERHAPS 50 MILLION MORE PEOPLE NEEDING WATER TO DRINK, FOR BATHS, FOR FARMING, FOR MANUFACTURING, AND FOR OTHER USES.

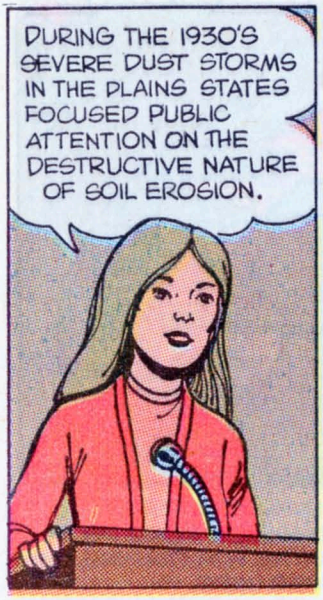


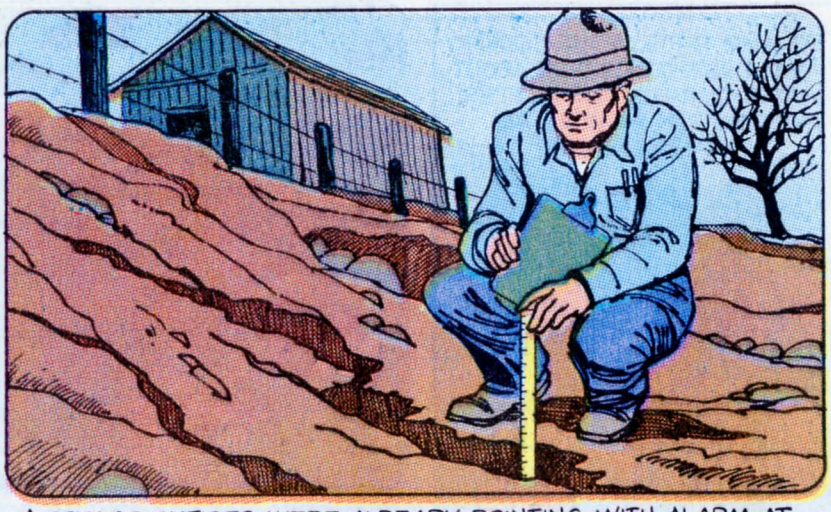
WE HAVE MORE LEISURE TIME AND ARE DEMANDING MORE WATER-RELATED RECREATION. PROVIDING AMPLE SUPPLIES OF WATER, KEEPING IT CLEAN, AND DIVIDING IT FAIRLY BETWEEN DIFFERENT USES IS A VERY BIG AND DIFFICULT JOB.



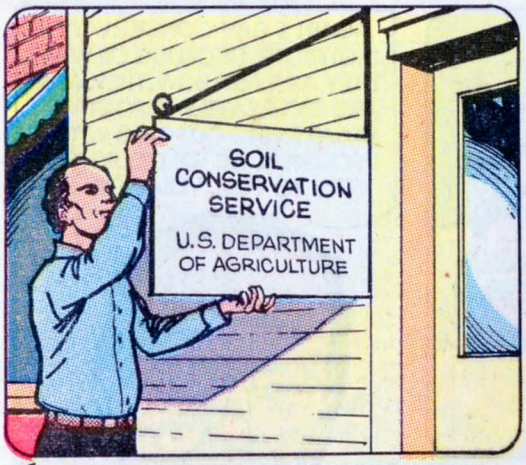
IT'S NOT A JOB THAT WILL BE FINISHED IN ANY ONE GENERATION. THAT'S WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, LIKE ANN AND JEFF, TO GET INVOLVED EARLY.







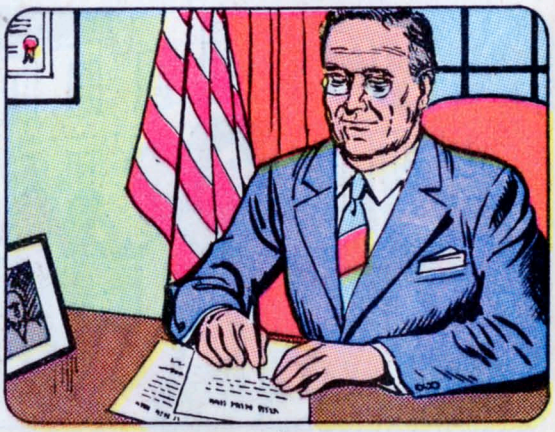
A FEW SCIENTISTS WERE ALREADY POINTING WITH ALARM AT THE MENACE OF SOIL EROSION, BOTH BY WIND AND BY WATER. BUT LITTLE WAS BEING DONE.



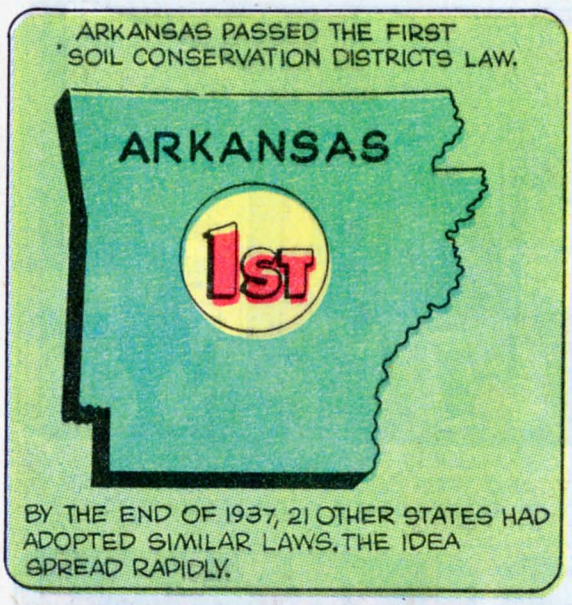
THE GREAT ECONOMIC DEPRESSION OF THAT PERIOD, PLUS THE DUST STORMS, SPURRED THE NATION TO ACTION. IN 1935 CONGRESS PASSED THE FIRST SOIL CONSERVATION LEGISLATION.

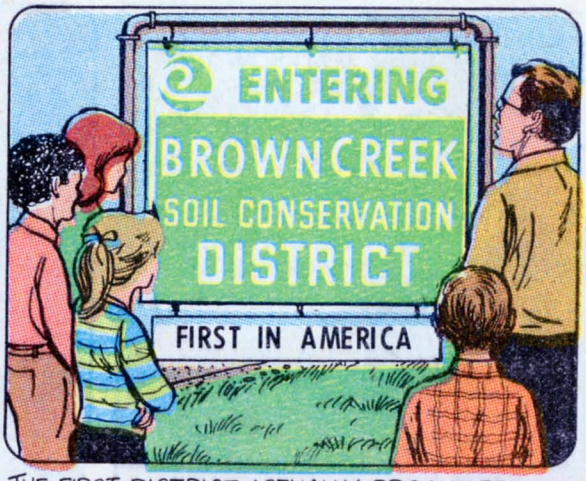
THOUSANDS OF YOUNG MEN IN THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS WERE PUT TO WORK ON EROSION CONTROL PROJECTS. THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE WORKED DIRECTLY WITH LANDOWNERS ON THEIR EROSION PROBLEMS.

THE PEOPLE WHO OWNED AND OPERATED FARMS AND RANCHES, WHO UNDERSTOOD LOCAL NEEDS AND PROBLEMS, SHOULD HAVE CHARGE OF PLANNING AND DIRECTING CONSERVATION WORK.

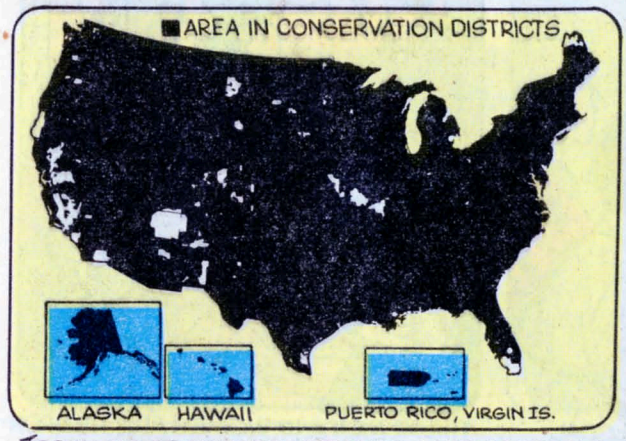


PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT WAS CONVINCED. IN APRIL 1937 HE URGED STATES TO PASS LAWS ALLOWING LANDOWNERS TO ORGANIZE SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS.

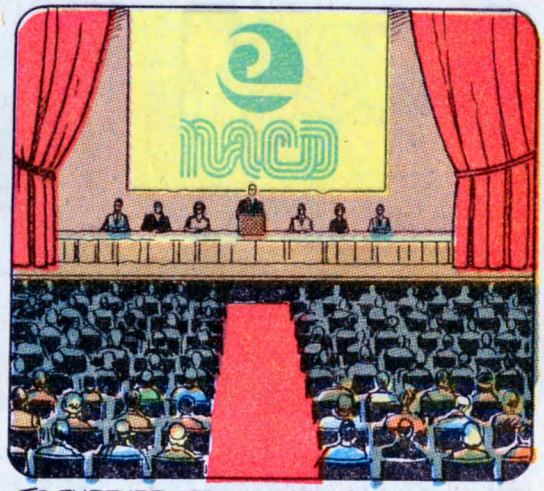




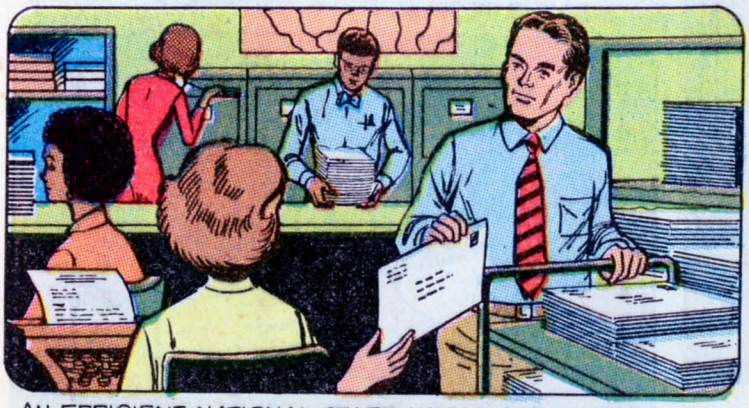
THE FIRST DISTRICT ACTUALLY ORGANIZED WAS IN NORTH CAROLINA--A GREAT MILESTONE IN THE NATION'S MOVEMENT TOWARD ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.



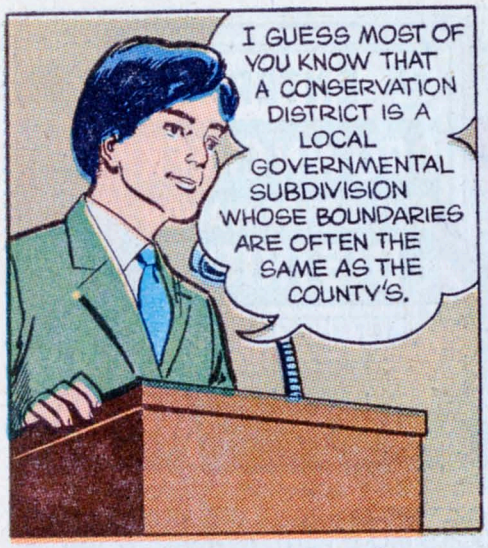
TODAY, MOST PRIVATELY OWNED LAND IN THE U.S. IS WITHIN A CONSERVATION DISTRICT. THERE ARE NEARLY 3,000 LOCAL DISTRICTS WHOSE AFFAIRS ARE RUN BY 17,000 LOCAL MEN AND WOMEN IN THE 50 STATES, PUERTO RICO AND THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.



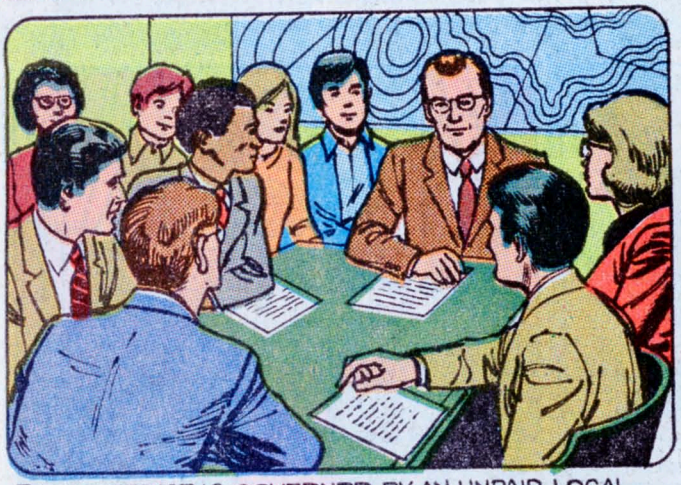
TO FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE MOVEMENT THE LOCAL DISTRICTS HAVE BANDED TOGETHER IN STATE ASSOCIATIONS AND A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION.



AN EFFICIENT NATIONAL STAFF, WITH EIGHT OFFICES AROUND THE COUNTRY, KEEPS DISTRICTS INFORMED AND SUPPLIED WITH HELPFUL MATERIALS. IT ALSO REPRESENTS THEM IN WORKING WITH CONGRESS, GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES AND CITIZEN ORGANIZATIONS.



A STATE COMMISSION HELPS DISTRICTS ORGANIZE, INITIALLY, AND THEN COORDINATES THEIR WORK WITH THAT OF OTHER STATE AGENCIES.

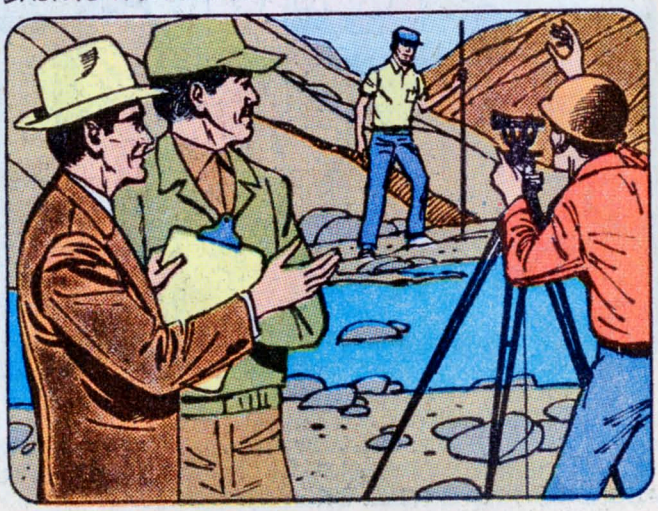


EACH DISTRICT IS GOVERNED BY AN UNPAID LOCAL BOARD WHOSE MEMBERS ARE CALLED "SUPERVISORS," "DIRECTORS" OR "COMMISSIONERS". SOME ARE APPOINTED, BUT MOST ARE ELECTED BY LOCAL PEOPLE, DEPENDING ON STATE LAW.

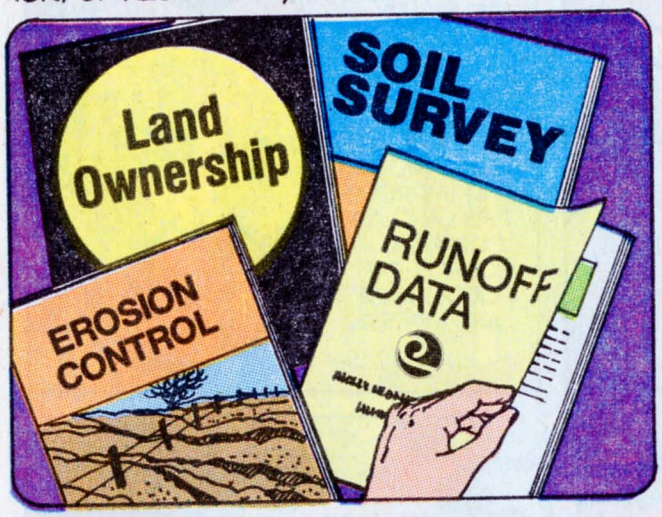
THESE MEN AND WOMEN ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSERVATION WORK WITHIN THE DISTRICT, MUCH AS THE SCHOOL BOARD IS RESPONSIBLE FOR EDUCATION.

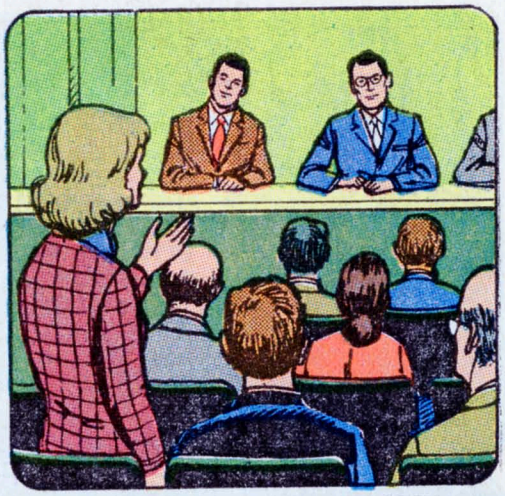
THE DISTRICT BOARD IS THE SPOKESMAN FOR LOCAL PEOPLE IN REPORTING CONSERVATION NEEDS TO THE COMMUNITY AND TO AGENCIES OF LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT...

... AND IS THE MAIN LOCAL ORGANIZATION THROUGH WHICH HELP FOR CONSERVATION IS CHANNELED BACK TO THE PEOPLE.



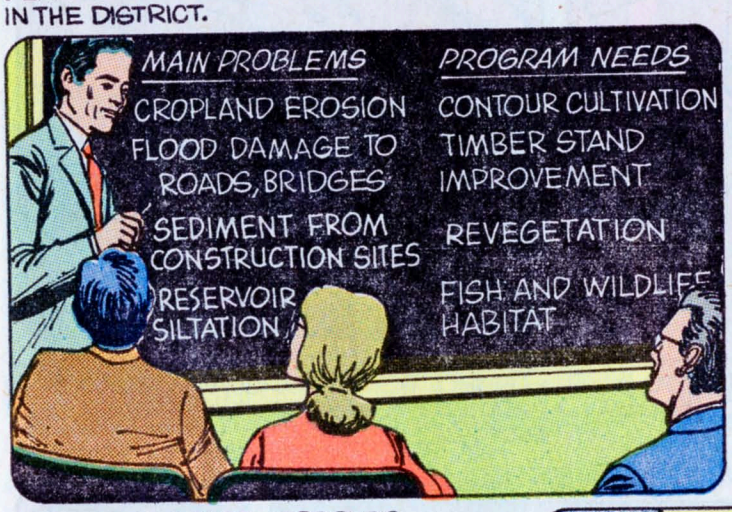
AS A FIRST STEP, THE DISTRICT MAKES AN INVENTORY OF RESOURCES, PROBLEMS AND NEEDS...





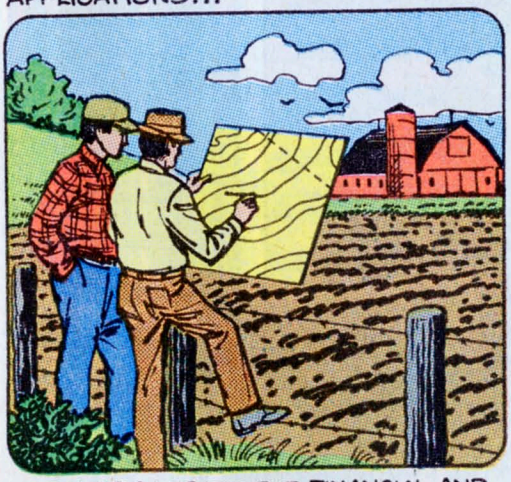
LOCAL PEOPLE AND GROUPS ARE ASKED FOR RECOMMENDATIONS.

THEN WE WORK UP A LONG-RANGE PROGRAM DEALING WITH ALL THE SOIL AND WATER PROBLEMS IN THE DISTRICT.

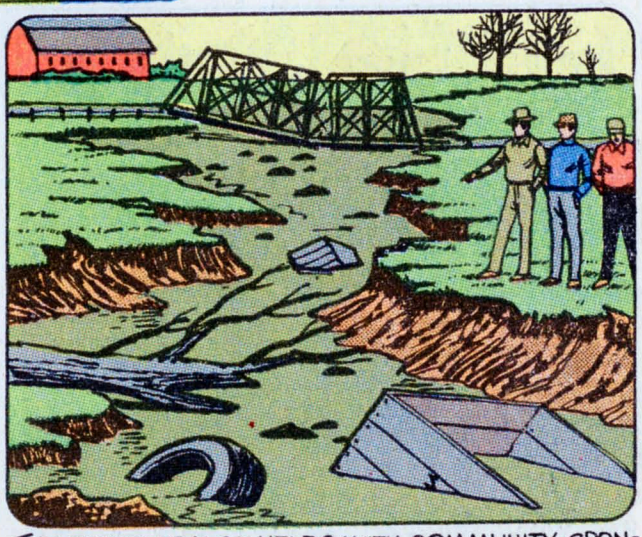


EACH DISTRICT MAKES AGREEMENTS WITH THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE AND OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES TO GIVE CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE TO LAND OWNERS AND USERS.

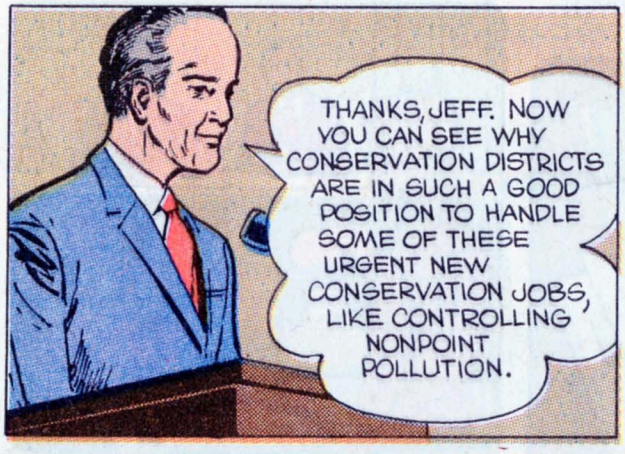
AFTER OUR BOARD APPROVES APPLICATIONS...

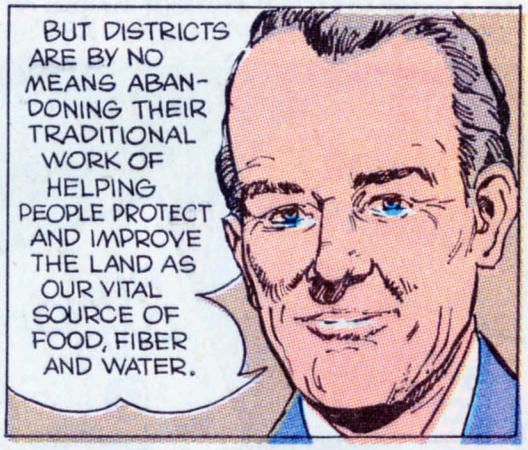


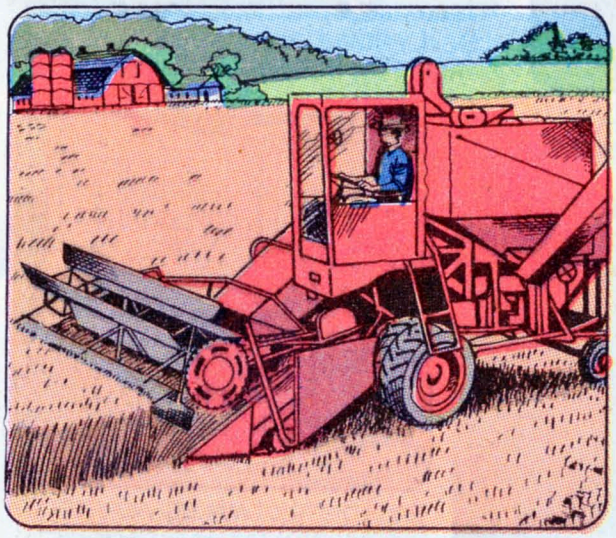
...IT HELPS LOCATE THE FINANCIAL AND OTHER HELP A LAND OWNER MAY NEED TO CARRY OUT PRACTICES AGREED UPON.



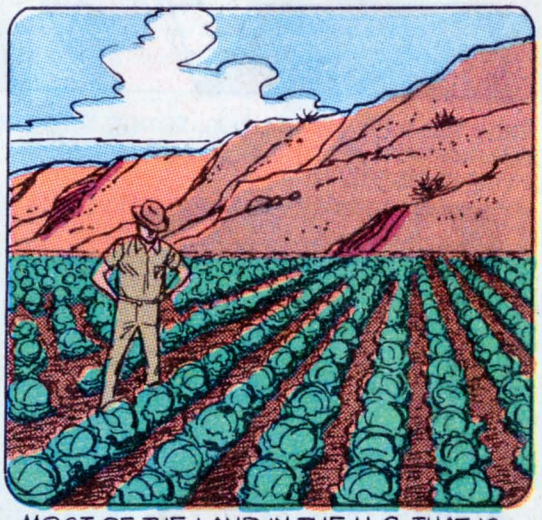
THE DISTRICT ALSO HELPS WITH COMMUNITY-SPONSORED PROJECTS IN FLOOD PREVENTION, WATERSHED PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.



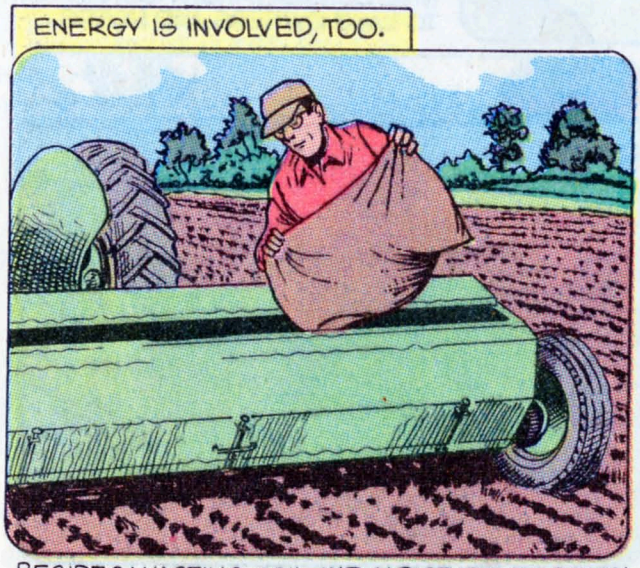




WITH WORLD FOOD NEEDS EXPECTED TO DOUBLE BY 2000, WE MUST KEEP OUR SOILS AS PRODUCTIVE AS POSSIBLE.

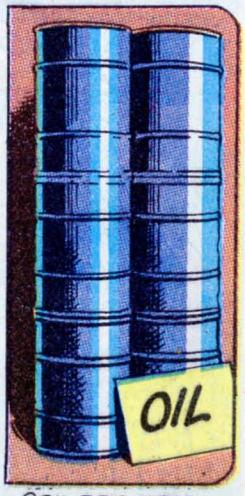


MOST OF THE LAND IN THE U.S. THAT IS SUITABLE FOR FARMING IS ALREADY IN PRODUCTION--WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOSE OR WASTE ANY.

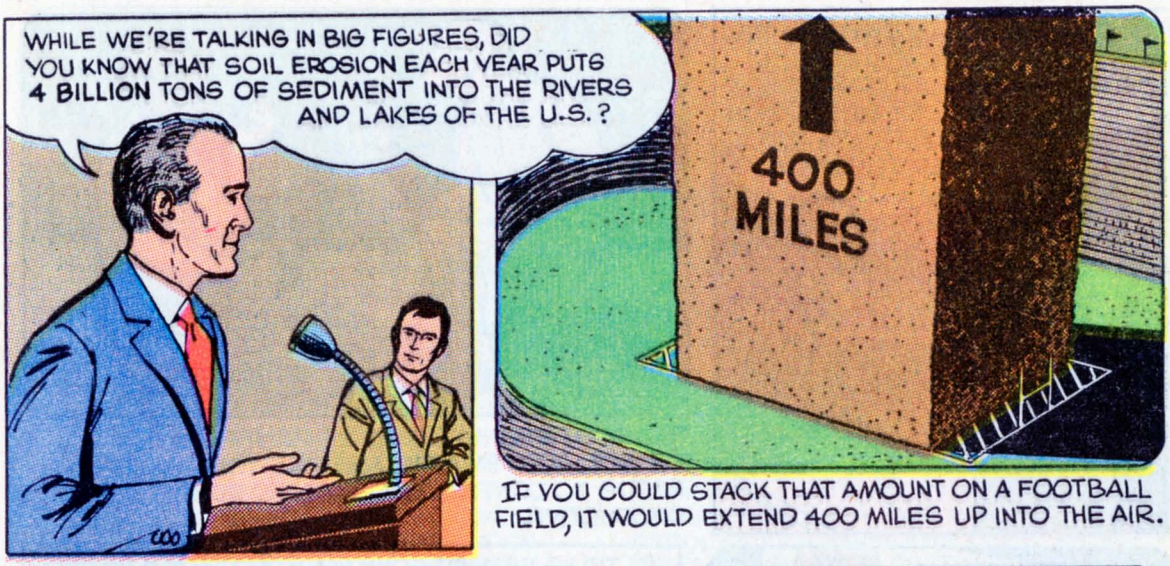


BESIDES WASTING SOIL AND MOISTURE, EROSION ROBS THE LAND OF PLANT NUTRIENTS THAT MUST BE REPLACED BY COSTLY COMMERCIAL FERTILIZERS IF WE ARE TO MAINTAIN FOOD PRODUCTION.

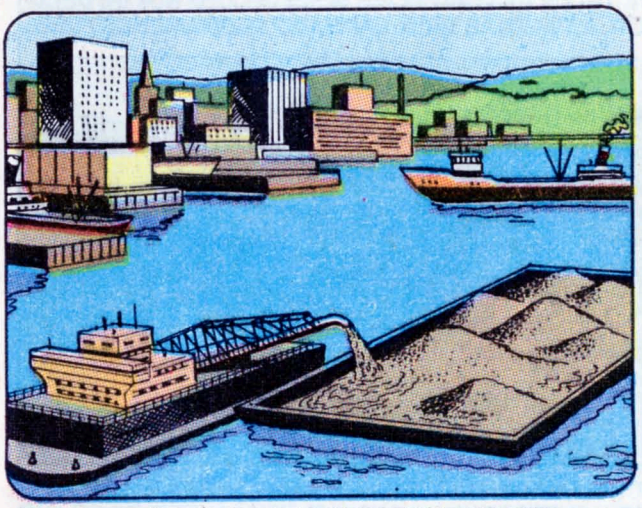
MANUFACTURING AND APPLYING THAT EXTRA FERTILIZER TAKES ENERGY THAT COULD BE USED ELSEWHERE.



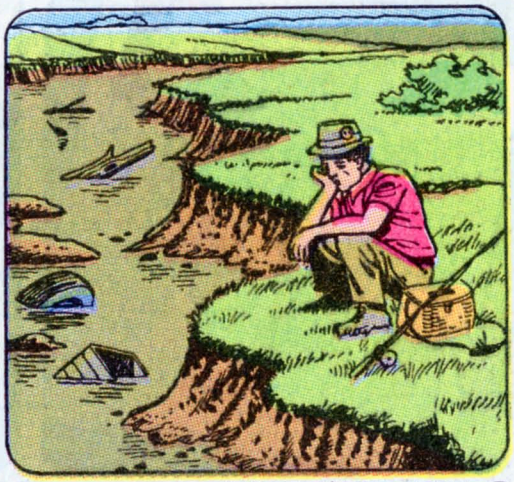
SOIL EROSION COSTS US THE EQUIVALENT OF 50 MILLION BARRELS OF OIL EACH YEAR.



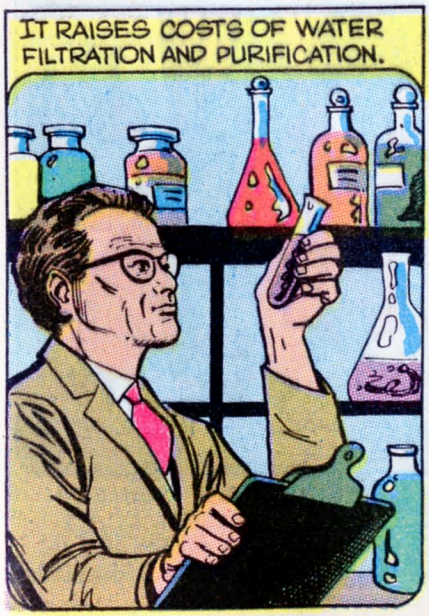
IF YOU COULD STACK THAT AMOUNT ON A FOOTBALL FIELD, IT WOULD EXTEND 400 MILES UP INTO THE AIR.

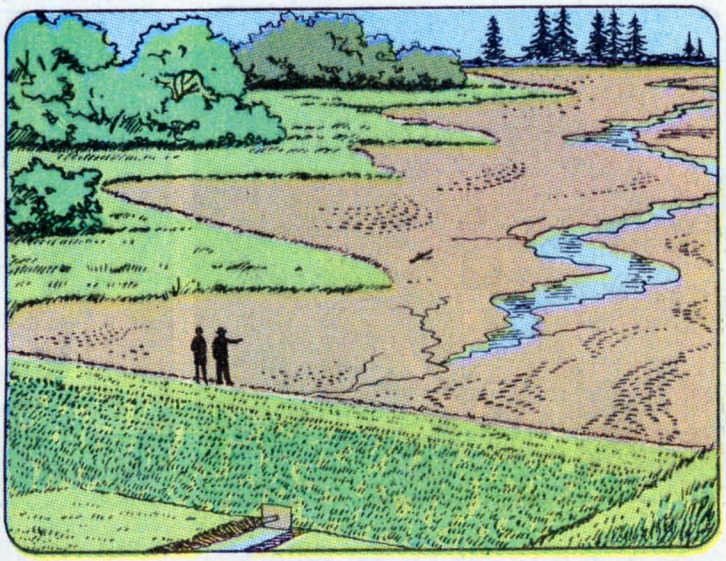


IT COSTS $50 MILLION EACH YEAR JUST TO DREDGE MUD OUT OF OUR HARBORS AND WATERWAYS.



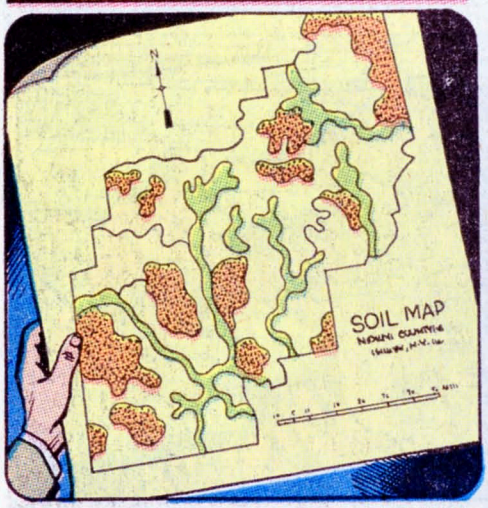
EROSION DOES MUCH TO HARM FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT, CHOKING STREAMS WITH MUD, POLLUTANTS AND OTHER DEBRIS.



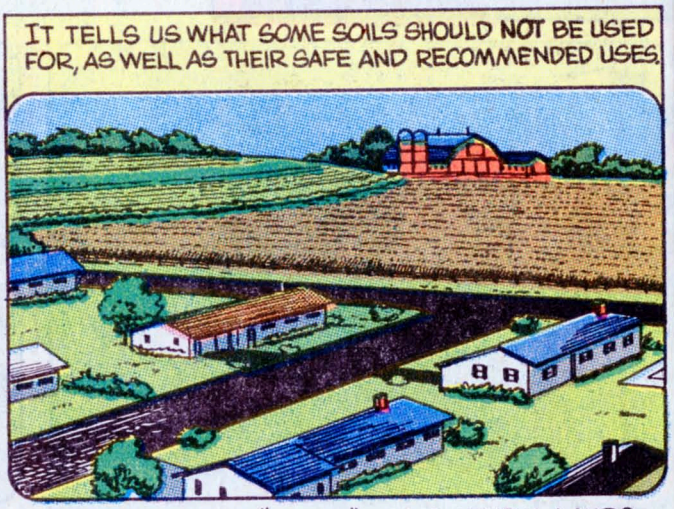


IT ROBS OUR RESERVOIRS OF THE NEEDED WATER STORAGE CAPACITY.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO GET A SCIENTIFIC INVENTORY OF THE SOIL, ACRE BY ACRE, AND FIND WHAT EACH ACRE NEEDS TO CONTROL EROSION AND KEEP IT PRODUCTIVE.

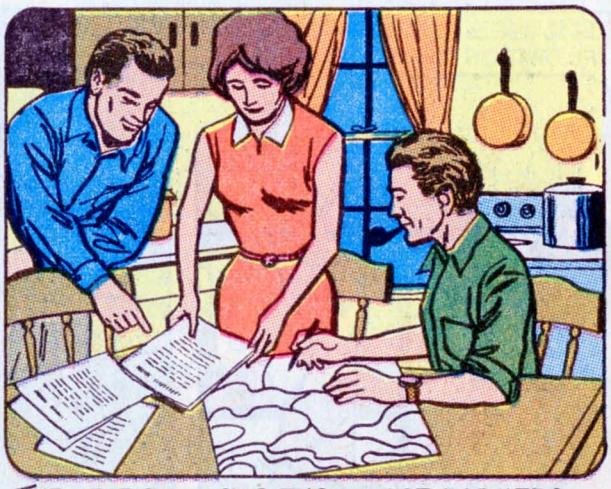


THIS INFORMATION IS PUT ON MAPS AND PUBLISHED AS A GUIDE FOR ALL KINDS OF LAND USE DECISIONS.

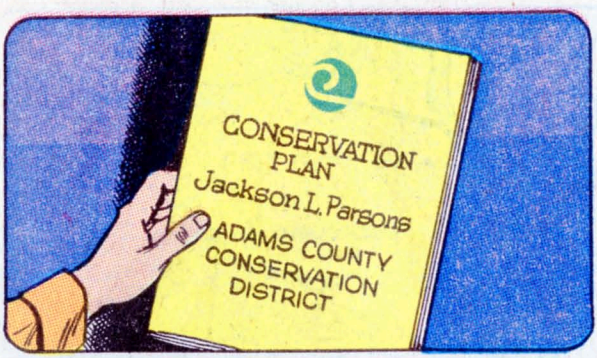


IT HELPS IDENTIFY "PRIME" AGRICULTURAL LANDS THAT WE ORDINARILY SHOULD RETAIN FOR FOOD AND FIBER PRODUCTION.

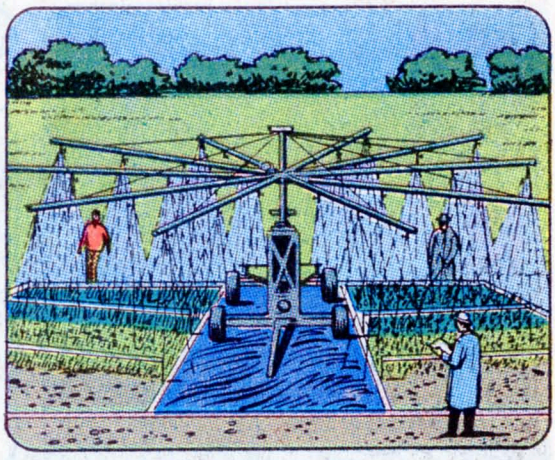
IT HELPS LOCATE SOIL AND MOISTURE CONDITIONS THAT ARE UNIQUELY SUITABLE FOR CERTAIN SPECIALTY CROPS.



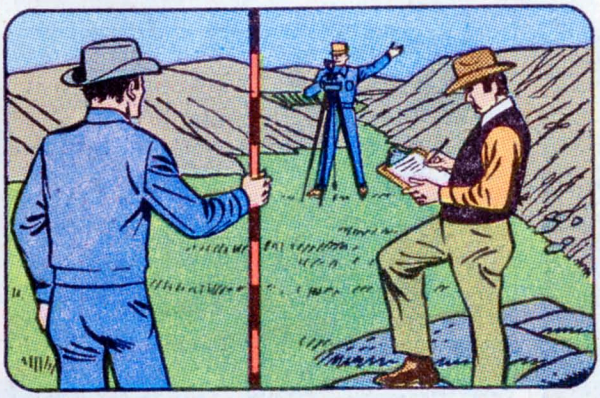
THE NEXT STEP IS TO ENCOURAGE FARMERS AND OTHER LAND USERS IN THE DISTRICT TO WORK WITH THE COOPERATING AGENCIES IN DEVELOPING AND CARRYING OUT CONSERVATION PLANS.



THE PLAN INCLUDES RECOMMENDATIONS AND SCHEDULES FOR BETTER MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF SOIL, BASED ON FACTS REVEALED BY THE SOIL SURVEY. MINIMUM TILLAGE, CONTOUR CULTIVATION, CROP ROTATION, PASTURE IMPROVEMENT, TIMBER-STAND IMPROVEMENT, WILDLIFE HABITAT PLANTINGS, IRRIGATION IMPROVEMENTS, TERRACING--THESE ARE SOME OF MANY THAT MIGHT BE INCLUDED.

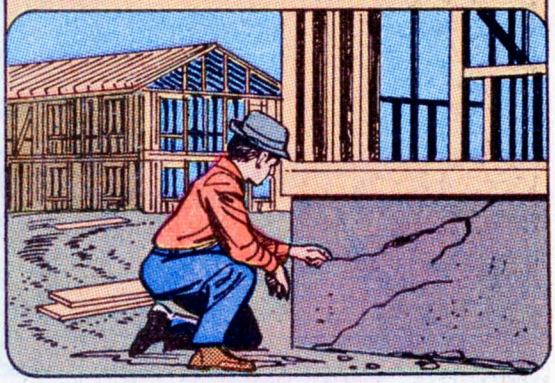


SCIENTIFIC TESTS, AS WELL AS PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE, SHOW THAT SOIL LOSS CAN BE REDUCED TO A HARMLESS LEVEL BY THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES, AS SHOWN IN THESE TEST PLOTS.

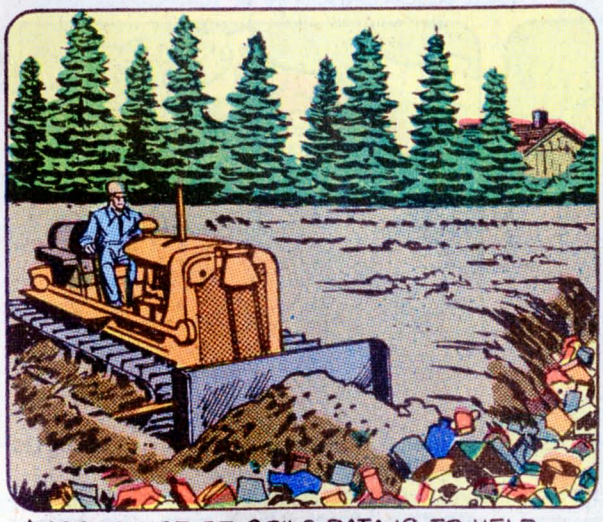


THE LANDOWNER MAKES ALL THE ARRANGEMENTS TO GET WORK DONE THAT IS CALLED FOR IN THE PLAN AND MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS THAT HELP DEFRAY THE COST OF CERTAIN CONSERVATION PRACTICES.

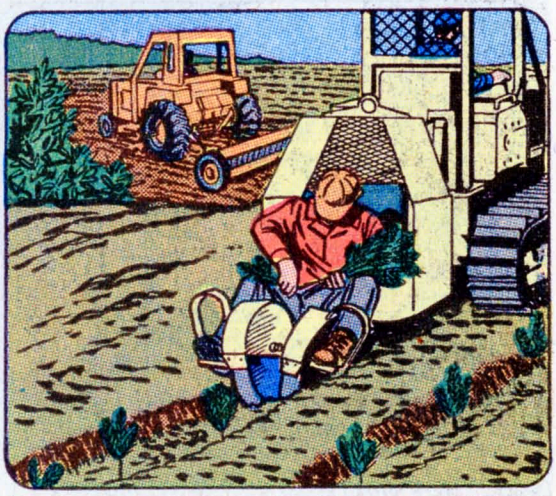
FARMERS ARE NOT THE ONLY LAND USERS WHO NEED SOILS INFORMATION.



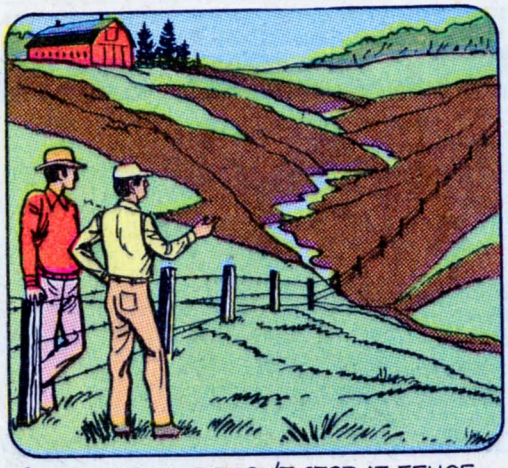
THE DISTRICT HELPS BUILDERS AVOID COSTLY MISTAKES. SOILS INFORMATION WARNS THEM OF POSSIBLE PROBLEMS BEFORE HOUSES ARE BUILT.



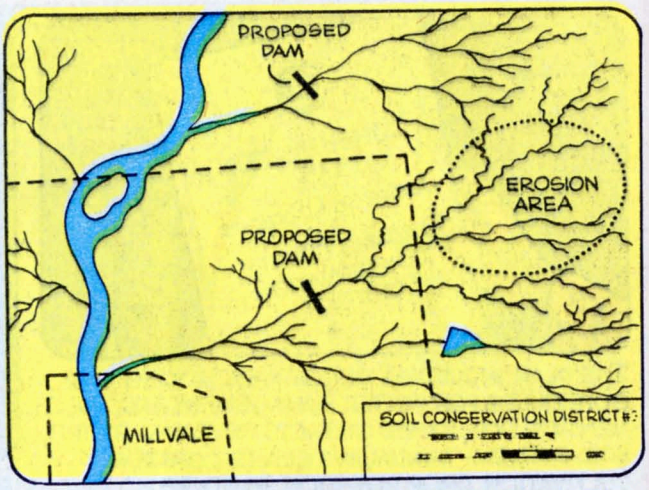
ANOTHER USE OF SOILS DATA IS TO HELP SELECT POTENTIAL SITES FOR SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL.



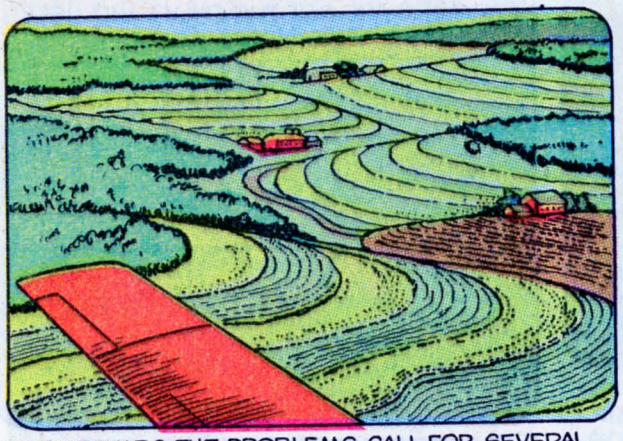
IN SOME STATES, DISTRICTS NOW APPROVE PLANS AND SUPERVISE THE RESTORATION AND VEGETATION OF STRIP-MINED LAND.



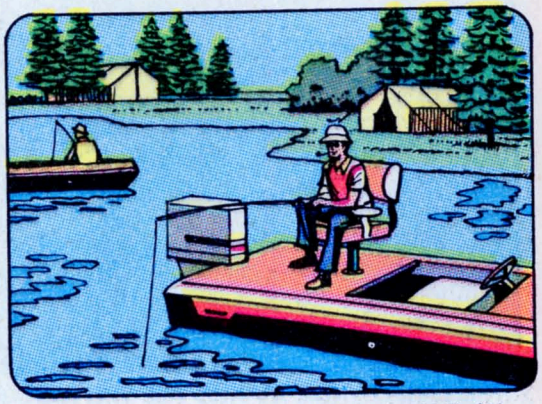
SOIL EROSION DOESN'T STOP AT FENCE LINES. SO CONSERVATION DISTRICTS OFTEN SPONSOR WATERSHED PROTECTION AND FLOOD PREVENTION PROJECTS THAT REDUCE DAMAGE AND CONSERVE WATER FOR AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY.



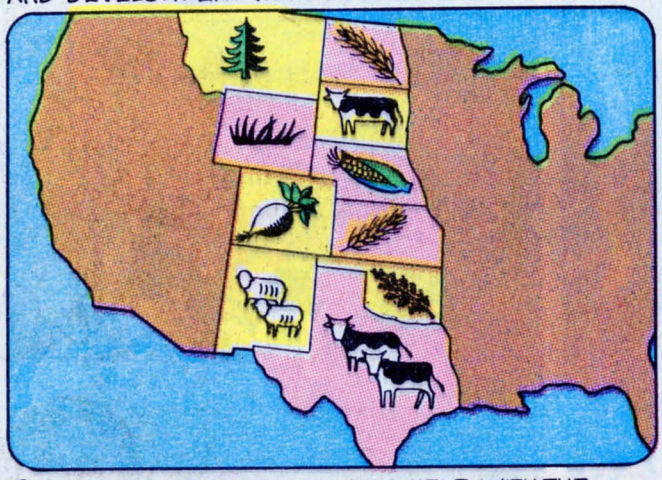
THESE PROJECTS COMBINE EROSION CONTROL ON FARMS AND RANCHES WITH RESERVOIRS TO SLOW RUNOFF AND STORE WATER FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE COMMUNITY.



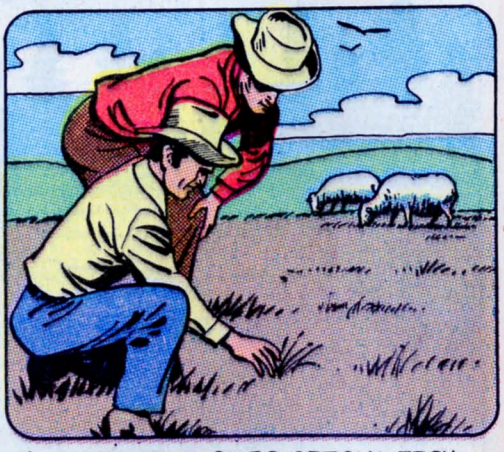
SOMETIMES THE PROBLEMS CALL FOR SEVERAL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS AND COMMUNITIES TO WORK TOGETHER IN RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT (RC & D) PROJECTS.



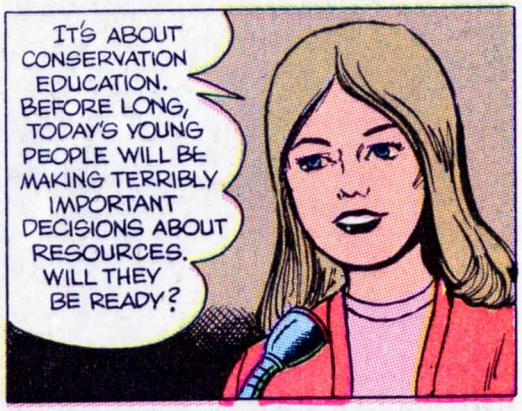
THE AIM IN RC & D PROJECTS IS TO PLAN DEVELOPMENTS THAT NOT ONLY SOLVE SOIL AND WATER PROBLEMS BUT ALSO BRING MORE INCOME TO THE AREA-- LIKE RECREATION AND TOURISM.



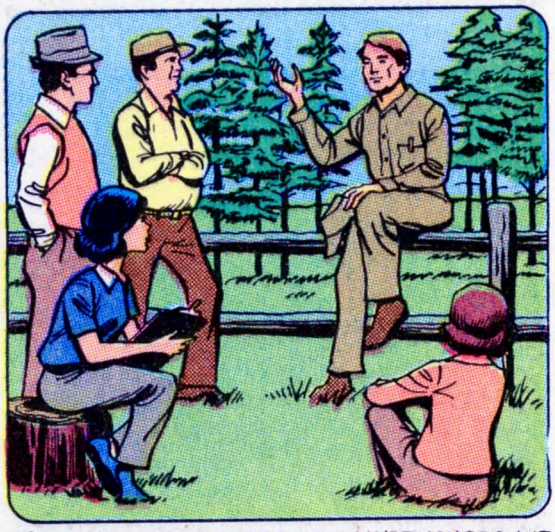
CONSERVATION DISTRICTS ALSO HELP WITH THE GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION PROGRAM, OPERATED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN DESIGNATED COUNTIES IN 10 STATES.



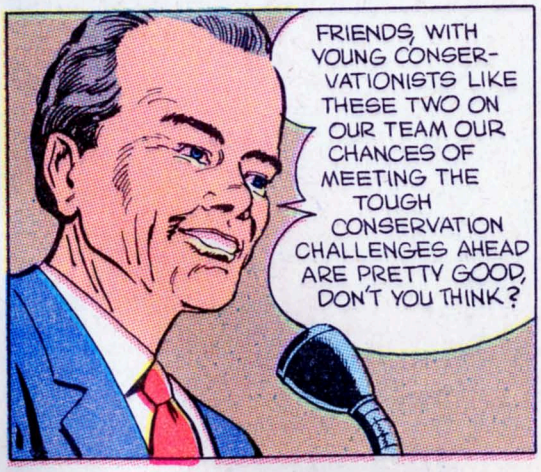
THIS PROGRAM GIVES SPECIAL TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL HELP TO RANCHERS AND FARMERS IN THIS DROUGHT-PRONE REGION, WHERE MUCH LAND IS UNSUITED FOR PERMANENT CULTIVATION.



DISTRICTS ARE MAKING SPECIAL EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION EDUCATION. ONE WAY IS BY INSTALLING CONSERVATION MEASURES RIGHT ON SCHOOL GROUNDS. THIS PROVIDES OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS FOR CONSERVATION STUDY.



THEY SPONSOR CONSERVATION WORKSHOPS AND SOMETIMES PROVIDE SCHOLARSHIPS TO HELP TEACHERS TAKE SPECIAL TRAINING.



THE SOIL CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF AMERICA (SCSA) IS AN ORGANIZATION OF MEN AND WOMEN ENGAGED IN CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES. WE ARE HAPPY TO PUBLISH THIS BOOKLET ABOUT CONSERVATION DISTRICTS AND APPRECIATE THE COOPERATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS IN ITS DEVELOPMENT.

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